

CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A method for providing data communication in vehicles, the method

5 comprising the steps of:

providing within a first vehicle a first vehicle active network providing intra-vehicle data communications for devices communicatively coupled to the first vehicle active network;

providing within a second vehicle a second vehicle active network providing
10 intra-vehicle data communications for devices communicatively coupled to the second vehicle active network;

communicatively linking the first vehicle active network and the second vehicle active network; and

communicating data from a first device communicatively coupled to one of
15 the first vehicle active network and the second vehicle active network to a second device communicatively coupled to one of the first vehicle active network and the second vehicle active network using the first vehicle active network and the second vehicle active network.

20 2. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of providing data from the first vehicle to the second vehicle via the first vehicle active network and the second vehicle active network.

25 3. The method of claim 2, wherein the data comprises navigation data.

4. The method of claim 2, wherein the data comprises entertainment data.

5. The method of claim 2, wherein the data comprises message data.

6. The method of claim 2, wherein the data comprises vehicle function data.

5

7. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of communicatively linking the first active network and the second active network comprises providing a wired data link.

10

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of communicatively linking the first active network and the second active network comprises providing a radio frequency data link.

15

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of communicatively linking the first active network and the second active network comprises providing an optical data link.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein the first vehicle comprises a motor vehicle and the second vehicle comprises a non-motor vehicle.

20

11. The method of claim 1, wherein the second vehicle is towed by the first vehicle.

12. The method of claim 1, further comprising communicatively linking a third active network of a third vehicle to one of the first active network and the second active network.

- 5 13. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:
determining the existence of a fault in the first vehicle, and
bypassing the fault in the first vehicle using the second active network.

- 10 14. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of communicatively linking the
first active network and the second active network comprises automatically linking
the first active network and the second active network based upon a proximity of the
first vehicle to the second vehicle.

- 15 15. A vehicle comprising a first device and a second device and a first active
network interconnecting the first device and the second device, the active network
being adaptable to communicatively link to a second active network of a second
vehicle.

- 20 16. The vehicle of claim 15, wherein the first active network comprises an
interface for communicatively linking the first active network and the second active
network.

17. The vehicle of claim 15, wherein the interface comprises a wired coupling.

18. The vehicle of claim 15, wherein the interface comprises a radio frequency coupling.

5 19. The vehicle of claim 15, wherein the interface comprises an optical coupling.

20. The vehicle of claim 15, wherein the second vehicle comprises a non-motor vehicle.

10 21. The vehicle of claim 20, wherein the second vehicle is towed by the vehicle.

22. The vehicle of claim 15, wherein the data is communicated between the first active network and the second active network.

15 23. The vehicle of claim 22, wherein the date comprises navigation data.

24. The vehicle of claim 22, wherein the date comprises entertainment data.

20 25. The vehicle of claim 22, wherein the date comprises message data.

26. The vehicle of claim 22, wherein the date comprises vehicle function data.

27. The vehicle of claim 15, wherein the first active network is adapted to automatically link to the second active network based upon a proximity of the second vehicle.

- 5 28. A communication network comprising:
 a plurality of vehicles, each vehicle having an active network for data communication within the vehicle, each active network being adapted to communicatively couple to the active network of at least one other vehicle of the plurality of vehicles, and wherein the active networks of at least two vehicles of the
 10 plurality of vehicles are communicatively coupled.

29. The communication network of claim 28, wherein the active networks of the at least two vehicles communicatively link based upon a proximity of the at least two vehicles.

- 15 30. The communication network of claim 28, wherein the at least two vehicles are operable to exchange data via the communicatively coupled active networks.